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ABSTRACT

A study examined the extent to which faculty senate involvement in strategic planning for inclusion influenced the implementation of inclusive practices in schools. Case studies in four West Virginia middle schools included examination of school strategic plans, observation, and teacher surveys and interviews. Analysis of findings across cases revealed some common themes: (1) actual changes in the structural model of schooling were related to how the larger system initially redefined teachers' positions within the school, not to faculty senate engagement in planning; (2) three schools restructured their service delivery model by redefining the special education teacher's role; (3) schools' unique characteristics affected how change was internalized; (4) faculty senates' inclusion plans gave limited attention to teachers' classroom practices; (5) special education enrollment and percentage did not impact the school's level of inclusion; (6) staffing patterns greatly impacted teacher collaboration levels and the extent of special education teachers' influence on regular classroom practices; and (7) a school's level of inclusion was related to the types of decisions made by its faculty senate. (Contains 41 references.) (SV)

REFORM THEORY INTO PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY EXAMINATION OF WEST VIRGINIA'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING THROUGH SITE-BASED PARTNERSHIP DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES

This study examined West Virginia's reform efforts to understand how faculty senate's site based management practices effect school restructuring to facilitate inclusion. Several interests prompted this topic's selection. First, this is the first time that a reform, at the national level, emphasizes a goal that gives recognition to individuals with disabilities. Of consequence, we know little about how the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and effort to support inclusive schooling impact education when presented within this context. Second, the goal is to build a restructured, interfaced coordinated service delivery system that deals more effectively with student diversity. In West Virginia each school responded by developing and implementing a Strategic Integration Plan that essentially details how each school adopts the principles of the IDEA on a systemic level. This process provides insight into the levels by which special and regular educators confront their differences and rethink conventional methods of practice. Finally, today's reform strategy seeks change by combining a top down and bottom up approach. West Virginia's efforts provide an opportunity to examine this undertaking and to determine the extent to which this strategy provides schools with a method to envision and practice the spirit of the reform.

A theoretical framework was established to guide the purpose of this study. From a literature review this study identified several theoretical propositions that highlight how current reform's combined components champion a significance. These key components in turn served as the underpinning that informed the study's focus, method of investigation, and process of data examination. The statements below summarize these factors and propositions contained therein:

Reform Strategy Factors:

- A top down change strategy provides an effective method for disseminating reform mandates (Goertz, 1986, 1988; Grossman, Kirst, Negash, & Schmidt-Posner, 1985; Kaye, 1985).
- A top down change strategy alone can not assure that schools carry out such changes in the classroom (Firestone, 1990; Fullan, 1994; Goodlad, 1992; Policy Analysis for California Education, 1986).
- A bottom up change strategy provides an effective method for increasing teacher participation (Taylor & Bogotch, 1994; Taylor & Teddlie, 1992; Weiss, 1992; Wohlsetter, Smyer & Mohrman, 1994).
- A bottom up change strategy, alone does not lead to changes in classroom practice (Elmore, 1993; Hallinger, Murphy & Hausman, 1991; Taylor & Bogotch, 1994; Taylor and Teddlie, 1992; Wohlsetter, Smyer & Mohrman, 1994).

Special Education as a Change Agent Factors:

- From a philosophical vantage point, IDEA's principles and practice for providing a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) create a contingency requiring educators to conduct an ethical deliberation of schooling (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Lieberman, 1996; Paul & Ward, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1990, 1992).
- From a pragmatic vantage point, IDEA's principles and practice for providing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in a LRE create a contingency requiring educators to redefine the school's model of a professional bureaucracy (Skrtic, 1991a, 1991b, 1995).

Reform Strategy Proposition 1:

- Combined top down, bottom up strategies create a more comprehensive and coherent model for change (Firestone, Fuhrman & Kirst, 1990; Fullan, 1994; Peters & Waterman, 1982).

Rationale

- Mandates from above guide the central direction of change and protect the core value it intends to achieve. Decision-making from below provides flexibility and encourages teacher ownership to facilitate goal implementation (Fullan, 1994; Peters & Waterman, 1982).

Reform Strategy Proposition 2:

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- Today's student-centered initiatives coupled with decentralized decision making create a comprehensive, multifaceted, systematic change process (Goertz, Floden and O'Day, 1996; Lavelly & McCarthy, 1995; Schrag, 1993).
- By adopting school wide student centered practices, teachers break their relative autonomy and make necessary for the coordination of teams and individuals to support each other (Duchnowski, Townsend, Hocutt, & McKinney, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1996; Villa & Thousand, 1990).
- Student centeredness challenges teachers to question their standardization of practice and to seek new instructional approaches that create a classroom learning atmosphere in which students of varying abilities and interests can achieve their potential (Stainback & Stainback, 1996).

From these patterns stated above, the study postulated that the degree to which faculty senate members engage in developing strategic plans for inclusion correlates with the extent to which their practices reflect a change. Stated differently, this study sought to examine whether schools with a higher perceived participatory role in decision making achieve a different level of inclusion then that of schools with a lower perceived participatory role in decision making. Ultimately, the study's purpose was to examine the degree to which a top down, bottom change strategy combined with a child centered inclusive change goal served as a catalyst of reform.

Methods

This study used quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. It organized these features by using a multiple case study strategy. Each school was a subject of an individual case and each case served a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry. The rationale underlying this process, therefore, followed a cross-experiment rather than a within-experiment logic of design. Each case served as a unit to predict similar results (a literal replication) or to produce contrary results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication, Yin, 1984).

Subjects

Through a census selection process, the study selected four case studies that differed and compared by rank order percentage of students receiving special education. Two counties with high (22.17%, 20.20%) and low percentages (15.97% and 14.26%) were selected (West Virginia Department of Education, 1997). From this pool, four schools containing grades' six, seven, and eight were identified. This selection criterion was used because it included schools that have already identified the majority of students eligible for special education services, given a majority of students served in special education are identified by this time in their school career (U.S. Department of Education, 1995) and excluded high schools where drop out and vocational programs decrease the number of students who actually receive special education services. Because the initial sample included all middle schools in the state of West Virginia, it included the distribution of the state's geographic and demographic diversity (large and small, urban and rural).

Instrumentation and Procedure

This study employed four data collection strategies: artifact examination; observation; teacher survey; and teacher interview. Each strategy was conducted over a sixteen week period between the months of August and December 1999.

Artifact Examination. The artifact examination involved an analysis of each case study's Strategic Plan for Managing the Inclusion of Students with Special Needs into the General Classroom. The purpose was to gain insight into the school's belief structure and behaviors by conducting an unobtrusive examination of the information that they generated for their own purposes. To guide this process, a content analysis protocol was developed to examine each of the plan's six components in relation to the requirements and suggestions described in the A Strategic Planning Guide for West Virginia Faculty Senates (1994).

Survey. The purpose of the survey was to determine the relationship between how the participants perceived their role as a faculty senate member and the degree to which their school integrated students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Questions from the Effective Practice Checklist: Building Level provided in A Strategic Planning Guide for West Virginia Faculty Senates (West Virginia Department of Education, 1994) was used to develop fifty question statements. Using a Likert scale the participants responded by selecting a score that

best reflects their beliefs and opinions about the statement. The response scale was as follows: one (never), two (rarely), three (sometimes), four (usually), and five (always). The survey also provided five additional questions that briefly asked for information about their educational background and teaching responsibilities.

The survey was piloted at two middle schools with sixty-eight teachers. These pilot survey responses were factor analyzed to reduce the data. The analysis also examined each item individually and in relation to the entire survey to establish reliability, validity, and to shorten as necessary. The factor analysis and reliability procedures eliminated twenty-five questions. A component factor analysis of the remaining thirty questions created four scales: Professional Practice, (reliability alpha of .8514); School Site Based Management Climate, (reliability alpha of .9155); Collaborative Teaming, (reliability alpha of .9017); and Student Involvement, (reliability alpha .8387). This survey was disseminated at each case study's first faculty Senate Meeting.

Observation. Over a four month period of time, multiple of observations were conducted to enrich the researcher's understanding of the climate and context of the setting being studied. Field notes were used to record observations at a minimum of two faculty senate meetings and thirteen all day visitations at each site. These field notes: characterized the substance and nature of the interaction that occurred at the faculty senate meetings; described events that occurred periodically throughout the school day; detailed classroom instructional activities; and recorded conversations and informal discussions between teachers and researcher.

Interviews. A loosely constructed interview protocol was used to conduct interviews. The protocol contained questions related to three areas of interest: teacher involvement with inclusion strategic plan process; opinion and knowledge about strategic plan's components; and evaluation of the plan's impact upon practice. During the interview, responses were audio taped and recorded using the note taking procedures described by Dillman (1978) and Spradley (1979).

Data Analysis and Presentation

Using a cross-experiment design, the data analysis organized the data into four case study profiles. Each individual case thereby consisted of a "whole" study. To create the individual cases, appropriate analysis of the embedded units (four data collection strategies) was conducted. A Content Analysis protocol as described by Putt and Springer (1989) guided the strategic inclusion plan content data analysis. Observation field notes and interviews were analyzed in accordance with established principles of qualitative research analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Spradley, 1979) and reduced by sorting each data source into categories (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). The teacher survey composite scores were calculated after principle component analysis of the survey was conducted. A pattern matching process based on the theoretical propositions was conducted to seek convergent evidence regarding the facts and conclusions for the case. Each case's conclusions were then examined in relation to the other individual cases. Ultimately, this comparison determined whether their outcome patterns coincided or contradicted with emerging theoretical predictions.

Results

The results listed below state the major findings identified in the cross case analysis.

1. The degree to which faculty senate members engaged in developing strategic integration plans did not correlate with the extent to how their structural model of schooling ultimately changed. The primary impetus for change instead was largely attributed to how the larger system initially redefined the teachers' positions within the organization.
2. Three of the case studies restructured their service delivery model by redefining the special educator's role. The system restructured the staff patterns by merging existing programs. By interfacing teacher responsibilities, the outcomes consequently advanced the system to some degree to become a more cohesive, coordinated model.
3. Schools have unique set of characteristics that effect how change is internalized. In each case the faculty senates' integration plans supported yet tailored how change was implemented. The faculty senate thereby served as an internal force that pushed up on the changes that external forces sent down.
4. The faculty senates' integration plans primarily addressed staffing, planning, and training needs to facilitate an integrative model of schooling and gave limited attention to activities that related to the teacher's classroom practice and student involvement.

5. The case studies' special education enrollment and county percentage of students receiving special education services did not impact the school's level of integration.
6. Staffing patterns greatly impact teacher collaboration levels. The levels of collaboration achieved was relative to the teacher's team affiliation and classroom model assignment.
7. The special educator who taught in collaboration with a regular educator shared a greater level of reciprocity in determining classroom practice than that of the special educators who provided consultative services with the regular educator.
8. More than half of the school's special educators continue to work in separate settings and do not have team membership. Special educators not affiliated with a team had the lowest level of interaction with others even if teachers shared student responsibility.
9. The faculty senates in schools with higher levels of integration made different types of decisions than that of faculty senates in schools with lower levels of integration.
10. Schools where faculty senates engage in decision making regarding school and teacher related concerns had a higher level of integration than that of schools where faculty senates engage in decision making regarding student concerns.

Discussion

In this study a pattern emerged. Each case study profile's revealed similar results (a literal replication) and contrary results for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication, Yin, 1984). From a systemic point of view, the impetus for change in each case was largely attributed to how the larger system initially redefined the teachers' positions within the organization. The study's conclusions therefore did not find that the degree to which faculty senate members engaged in developing strategic integration plans correlated with the extent to how their structural model of schooling ultimately changed. This is not to say that the schools that were studied did not undergo a restructuring process; rather the faculty senate was not responsible for redefining the delivery model of service. The plan's staffing model instead reflected the degree to which the system induced change and not the degree to which the faculty senate engaged in the plan's development.

An understanding of the bureaucratic nature of schooling provides insight to interpreting these findings. It is known that the schools arrange and define a teacher's position within the organization based on expertise. While the teacher's level of acquired training decreases the organization's need to regulate their work it also reinforces the teachers to perceive their role as important and interdependent to the system's operations. The teacher's sense of professionalism consequently diverts their attention from envisioning a model that questions their position's validity. It is therefore predictable that the restructuring of the school's staffing patterns resulted from changes introduced by the greater system and not by the faculty senate's plans.

In each of the case studies, the faculty senates served as an internal force that pushed up on the changes that external forces sent down. Their plans supported yet tailored how change was implemented. Because each plan differently defined how teachers were to interact, the four case studies ultimately revealed that schools have unique set of characteristics that effect how change is internalized. Each school operated under the same guidelines put forth by the Federal, IDEA, and State, Integrative Schools Initiative mandate, yet each sought different practices to achieve the same goal. From a change strategy perspective, this phenomenon illustrates how top down mandates coupled with school based decision making creates a relationship that is complex, nonlinear, and yet complementary. The mandates from above guided the central direction of change and protected the core value it intended to achieve while the decision making from below provided flexibility and encouraged teacher ownership to facilitate goal implementation.

In three of the case studies, the schools restructured their service delivery model by redefining the special educator's role. Several teachers were assigned to a regular education team to provide collaborative support within in the regular education setting. Because the schools did not hire additional teachers to fulfill this role, the schools essentially decreased the number of separate settings by reassigning the students and special educators to integrated classrooms. Opposed to creating add-ons, the schools merged existing programs. Consequently these efforts advanced the system to some degree to become a more cohesive, coordinated model by interfacing teacher responsibilities. It is noteworthy that the case studies' special education enrollment and county percentage of students receiving special education services did not correlate with the level of integration the schools achieved. Two schools that had a similar number of students with IEPs, one school maintained seven separate classroom

settings, whereas the other only had two. These findings reveal that goal achievement is not contingent upon factors, such as student enrollment, over which schools have little control. It instead suggests that outcomes relate to how the schools coordinated their service delivery system to become more cohesive model.

The degree to which the schools achieved a comprehensive, multifaceted level of change remains suspect. Although three schools increased their level of integration by assigning the students to the regular classroom setting and the special educator to their team, more than half of the school's other special educators continue to work in separate settings and do not have team membership. This is problematic because across the four case studies a pattern emerged whereby the teacher's level of collaboration related to their team affiliation and classroom assignment. The highest level of interaction occurred between staff who worked together in the same classroom. Teachers assigned to the same teams likewise had a higher level of interaction than those who were not. Teachers not assigned to a team primarily worked alone regardless if they shared student responsibility. These findings demonstrate how the school's staffing patterns impact teacher's level of collaboration. Furthermore, by assigning a special educator to a team the school not only changed that teacher's role and responsibilities but also to a lesser extent increased the other team member's involvement in determining student programs of study.

Within the teams a pattern emerged with regard to the types of decisions the teachers made and the degree to which classroom practice changed. In the one school where the special educator taught in collaboration with a regular educator, the teacher shared a greater level of reciprocity in determining classroom practice than that in the two schools where the special educator shared consultative services with the regular educator. Across the four case studies however the regular educators reported that their classroom's increase in students with IEPs did not change their practice. The special educators who worked in integrated settings on the other hand reported that their practices changed from determining what to teach to how to support the other teacher's instruction. These findings suggest that the increased level of integration did not result in having an equally compelling impact on whether classroom practice changed.

The reason the data failed to reflect an increased change in classroom practice is difficult to ascertain. The survey data across the four schools reported that teachers perceived to have a higher level of professional practice in comparison to the factors that related to their site base management and collaboration participation. Perhaps teachers do not perceive the increased level of integration as a change in the classroom's composition of student need. Although the literature supports that students with IEPs have similar needs to peers who also have difficulty, it nonetheless calls into question how and the degree to which the teacher's notion of a disability imparts the need to change practice. The school's Strategic plans supports this notion. Each school's plans commonly noted goals and objectives that related to the teacher's staffing, planning, and training needs. The focus was administrative in nature. They primarily dealt with issues that promoted the organizational aspects of change and gave limited attention to activities that related to how teachers facilitate an inclusive environment within the classroom.

The content of the strategic plans and lack of instructional change in classroom questions the degree to that teacher's perceived role in determining decisions impacts their practice. The concerns addressed in the plans are impersonal in the sense that they define teacher opportunity such as the availability of joint planning time. In contrast, items not addressed are personal in that they describe behaviors that teachers must practice. The rationale used to understand why the greater system and not the faculty senate plans created the changes that reorganized the school's staffing pattern may be pertinent. From a change strategy point of view, the bureaucratic structure of schooling may thwart teacher's ability and propensity to make decisions that systematically define the quality of teacher practice. The bureaucracy arranges and defines the teacher's position within the organization in order to maintain a stable environment. This condition impedes the teachers' ability to determine individual's mode of practice, employment, or status. The teacher's level of expertise also loosely couples the teachers within the organization to allow them to work directly with students and less with their peers. As a result, teachers only collectively control their colleagues' practice and lack the standpoint to redefine each other's role within the larger system.

The purpose of this study ultimately sought to examine whether schools with a higher perceived participatory role in decision making achieve a different level of inclusive practices than that of schools with a lower perceived participatory role in decision making. The conclusions demonstrated that the school's level of inclusion had a relationship with the faculty senate's level of involvement with committee decision making and types of

decisions the teachers made. The findings however did not ascertain whether this relationship demonstrated a difference in levels of participation but only that there is a difference in the type of decisions.

The emerged pattern revealed that the two case studies with a greater level of integration had fewer faculty senate committees. Their faculty senates spent more time discussing an agenda presented by administration and less time on teacher driven proposals. The majority of their decisions also dealt with concerns that benefit teachers. The two schools with lower levels of integration on the other hand had a greater number of faculty senate committees. They spent more faculty senate time on discussing teacher driven proposals and the majority of their decisions dealt with concerns that benefit students.

These findings suggest that the school's level of integration influences the dynamics of the school's decision making practices. In each case study the majority of the teachers are assigned to team and each team has the opportunity to meet daily during a common planning period. The data supports that these team's decisions primarily concerned their student and classroom practice. The focus of these decisions therefore was to benefit the student. In schools with higher levels of inclusion, it is reasonable to assume that the student composition within the teams has greater diversity and thereby creates less variability across programs. This diversity in turn creates the need for the teams to engage in decision making to address a variety of different concerns. As a result, the teams may decrease faculty senate's need to engage in these types of decisions. In other words, if the team's decisions bring benefit to students that have a greater diversity of need, the role their faculty senates have less need to engage in student related concerns and can focus more on making decisions that benefit the teachers and school.

In contrast the schools with a lower level of inclusion have greater homogeneity within the classroom and a greater level of student diversity across programs. In teams where there is less student diversity the team's decision making process concerns students with fewer differences. As each team concerns different student needs, the variance across programs increases. For example, the team of special educators deal with a different set of student concerns in comparison to the team's decisions that do not have students with IEPs. As a result the school decreases the likelihood that the programs share the same mode of operation. These differences in turn may give rise to the need of faculty senates to seek methods that micro-manage practice across programs. In other words, the level of program variability or seclusion fragment the organization's mode of operation into a series of different units and thereby cause the faculty senates to engage in more student related decisions in response to the school's needs to seek cohesion.

Limitations. Although a repeated pattern emerged among the case studies, the validation of the findings warrants a replication of study. The process, however, needs to recognize that the study's primary focus examined West Virginia's reform efforts. As a result this state specific framework questions the degree to which this study may be replicated in other states. Such practice would require a need to revise the instruments' foci in accordance to that particular state's policy mandates. Each case study was a middle school. In this setting, the majority of the staff are members of teams. Each team teaches the same students and shares a planning period to facilitate collaborative relationships. This organizational structuring differs from the elementary and high school settings where teachers are not assigned to teams. The generalization of findings therefore may not replicate in these other settings. Finally, the data regarding each case studies' special education only includes students with IEPs in the areas of learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and mild and moderate mental impairments. The results therefore are limited to the mild and moderate special education population and do not include students in the severe and multiple or gifted education programs.

Implications. In today's reform, mandates from above send schools guiding principles that favor decentralized practices. In theory, because these efforts combine previous reform's top-down and bottom-up change strategies, they provide a change model that is comprehensive. The findings of this study however suggest that the bureaucratic nature of schooling continues to have an impact on how change translates into practice. To overcome these barriers top down mandates must initially provide the effort to restructure the staffing patterns within the organization if the goal is to change the nature in which teachers interact. Furthermore, it is not enough to examine only practice or policy; the complexity of schooling requires a simultaneous understanding of both. Methods of inquiry therefore need to inform policy and practice in a manner that is meaningful to both.

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